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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL, AND DRL/CRA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: USG promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka

Ref: State 13790

1. Per Reftel, Mission's response to the request for information on how we are promoting human rights in Sri Lanka follows:

2. PEACE PROCESS: The ongoing peace process has had more of a direct and dramatic impact on improving the human rights situation in Sri Lanka than any other factor during the past year. Mission contributes to the peace process in numerous ways, including through consistent and high-level use of public diplomacy tools, and also private interaction with key actors. Another visible means of assistance was the donation of approximately USD 500,000 to help start up the GSL's Peace Secretariat. The Secretariat is still using those funds. USAID has also contributed close to USD 1.5 million to support the peace process through several projects, including the provision of technical experts to the Peace Secretariat and for outreach programs to engage the public. Other programs to assist and reinforce the peace process are being considered.

3. LEAHY CHECKS/MILITARY: In the past, Mission has on occasion refused training for certain security force personnel because of their possible involvement in human rights violations. Mission has informed the Sri Lankan security forces of the necessity of conducting a human rights based background check on personnel recommended for training. The past year has seen the security forces become more self-limiting as to who is nominated for proposed training programs. In addition, Mission personnel have presented numerous demarches to various levels of the GSL on the need to address the issue of impunity within the security forces. In that regard, the security forces appear to be taking steps to overcome a history of human rights violations and impunity with the opening of multiple investigations during the year. There have also been some convictions.

4. INTERNATIONAL VISITORS PROGRAM (IVP): Mission uses IVP grants to further its MPP goals in regard to the promotion of human rights and religious tolerance. During the past year, for example, Mission nominated a Sri Lankan Muslim leader to participate in an "Islam in America" program. Mission also nominated a number of key individuals from human rights organizations for programs focusing on improving organizational modalities and how to focus on human rights-related judicial actions.

5. LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE): The LTTE is on the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list and Mission does not have direct contact with its members. During the course of the year, however, Mission has repeatedly made public statements raising concerns about the forcible recruitment of children and the harassment of the minority Muslim population in the east by the LTTE. Moreover, Mission regularly meets with Tamil politicians and other Tamil leaders who are believed to have contact with the LTTE. Mission delivers consistent messages to these interlocutors on the need for the LTTE to stop employing violence and terrorism, stop recruiting children, embrace pluralism, and abide by all other international human rights standards. Although Mission's contributions were only one part of a larger campaign by the international community aimed at prompting responsiveness from the LTTE, at year's end tensions between the Muslim community and LTTE had eased somewhat, and the LTTE has agreed to renew its work with UNICEF to stop child recruitment and counteract the effects on those already recruited.

6. JUDICIAL REFORM: Mission has taken the first steps toward implementing a DRL-funded project to address Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) cases. The GSL has a history of using PTA cases to arrest Tamils arbitrarily. The PTA permitted the government to hold these individuals in remand for an undetermined amount of time. Some individuals have been in custody for a matter of years without having their cases heard in court. As part of the ongoing peace process, the GSL has not arrested anyone under the PTA during the past year and has actively begun to re-examine PTA cases.

Taking advantage of the GSL's newfound openness on these cases, Mission -- using DRL funds -- has initiated the purchasing of equipment to process the cases and is in the final stages of helping fund attorneys for individuals still in custody.

17. SPECIFIC PROJECTS: In addition to regular contact with GSL representatives on human rights issues, Mission also supports individual programs focused on specific issues. For example, Mission has provided assistance to the National Child Protection Authority and the Don Bosco Technical Center for their work in combating trafficking in children and rehabilitating those that have been sexually exploited. A demining program was also conducted to assist in permitting IDP's to safely return to their home communities in Jaffna District. Mission continues to look for opportunities to support specific human rights programs as part of the USG's promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka.

18. Minimize considered.

WILLS